

“Women in trade unions and gender transformation: A case study of the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (NUMSA)”

A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Arts Degree in the field of Industrial Sociology.

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Supervised by: Dr. Sarah Mosoetsa

Nokwanda Siphesihle Sihlali

Student number: 457205

Abstract

This study explored the state of gender transformation and the role of trade unions in the workplace in post-apartheid South Africa. This study tried to uncover how the women and the men are using gender structures to transform the gender dynamics that are assumed to exist within masculinised spaces and more specially masculinised trade unions utilising a feminist theoretical framework. By exploring how the gender structures work within NUMSA, as the focus of the study, this research tries to argue that in union organising, race is still principle and the main unifier between female and male trade unionists and as a result women fail to organise amongst themselves as they see gender issues as secondary to the issues that affect everyone else, such as employment protection, wage issues and racial discrimination in the workplace. There is a significant amount of literature that has already been conducted on this research topic that emanates from the European perspective where race issues are not primary, as the majority of union members within European countries are white. However, I hope to add to this growing scholarship by providing a look at the black South African unions and how they are changing to accommodate a growing female workforce that is entering industries unionised by NUMSA. Participants in the study consisted of ordinary twelve ordinary female members, two female shop stewards, one female union official and five shop male stewards. This study employed a qualitative research method to acquire the narratives of the informants through in-depth interviews. Ranging in ages from twenty five to fifty six and having between two to nineteen experience as NUMSA members.

DECLARATION

I declare that this research project entitled “Women in trade unions and gender transformation: A case study of the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (NUMSA)” is my original effort. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at this or any other university.

Signed_____

Nokwanda Siphesihle Sihlali

This_____ day of _____ 2015.

Dedication

This research paper is dedicated to my late maternal grandmother Jabulile Priscella Sihlali. My constant source of inspiration and motivation, you will always be with me. Thank you for teaching me about laughter and treating others with kindness. And to my paternal grandmother Fikile Mabel Zulu, uthando lwam.

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List of Abbreviations

ILO - International Labour Organisation FAWU - Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union

MAWU - Metal and Allied Workers Union

MICWU - Motor Industry Combined Workers Union

NWWC - National Women Workers Committee

NEDLAC - National Economic Development and Labour Council

NAAWU - National Automobile and Allied Workers Union

NUMSA - National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa

SACCAWU - South African Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union

UMMAWOSA - United Metal, Mining and Allied Workers of South Africa

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